

SCOTTISH WALL PAINTINGS CONSERVATORS

Fiona Allardyce ACR♦

MA (Hons) Edin., MA (Hons) Courtauld Inst., London;
Dip Cons, ICR Rome

Karen Dundas

BA Simon Fraser Univ., BC, Canada;
Dip ConsRest (Hons), CEROA Madrid

CONSERVATION/RESTORATION OF STRUCTURAL PAINTED DECORATION

Telephone: (07966) 649299 Email: wallpaintings@gmail.com

CROMARTY EAST CHURCH

Painted Armorial Panels Conservation Treatment Report

INTRODUCTION

Now that the pieces have been cleaned and treated, we have made several observations which alter some of the statements in our initial assessment report. For instance, in the case of Lady Anna's arms, we discovered that one of the unlocated panels in fact forms part of the lower frame of the text (see Figure 1). This panel is not illustrated on Scott's 1968 reconstruction drawing.



Figure 1: known locations of Lady Anna's armorial painted panels.



Figure 2: known locations of Sir Kenneth's armorial painted panels.

The arms of Sir Kenneth remain as illustrated by Scott (see Figure 2). A further painted panel with a sunburst remains unlocated. It is painted in a similar style to the arms, and may be associated with them in some way, however its location cannot be determined. The sun motif is also visible on the pews, however these in situ panels are painted in a different style from the arms (see Figures 3, 4).



Figure 3: panel with sunburst, unlocated



Figure 4: pew panel with sunburst – different painting style

Previously we had assumed that the tongue and groove jointing of the panels was part of their original construction. However, the joints do not correspond if one tries to re-assemble the panels (see Figure 5), and it soon became clear that these joints belong to the time when the arms were broken into smaller pieces and used as part of the pews. Originally the arms would have been made of quite large panels, probably about double their present width, and occasionally one may see the original joints, which were birdsmouth rather than tongue and groove. Each panel probably ran the entire height of the armorial plaque.



Figure 5: two non-corresponding grooved joints rather than a tongue and a groove.

The RCAHMS photographs with accompanying notes suggest that the paintings are in tempera, although they are in fact painted in oils. This is normal for coats of arms where the aim is for the colours to be rich and glossy.

WOODWORM

There seems to be more evidence of woodworm damage on the panels than was previously observed. Further, it was noted during our visit that active woodworm is also present in the church. The panels will be treated for woodworm prior to their return to the Cromarty. It would be advisable to ensure that there is no active woodworm in the church by that time.

ORIGINAL LOCATION

On the RCAHMS photographs with accompanying notes it is suggested that the paintings were originally on the ceiling. It is not known if this information is based on any evidence. It is not even certain that they were originally from the church, however this is quite probable. They were extremely large, each measuring approximately 1.5m x 2.0m originally, at the least, and possible even more given that there are several painted panels without design that seem to belong to the same hand. Given that the church was still the simple 'cell' building when the arms were first painted, it is possible that they took up an entire wall (N wall for instance?). Otherwise it is hard to imagine where they could have been other than on a ceiling.

CONSERVATION TREATMENT

Cleaning

All 37 painted panels (including those without any design), were cleaned. This involved removing surface dirt. Not all the panels had a varnish coating, but where present this was also removed (see Figures 6-9).



Figure 6: during the cleaning process



Figure 7: after the cleaning process



Figure 8: during the cleaning process



Figure 9: during the cleaning process

Varnishing

All the painted panels have been revarnished. Those without any design have been varnished once with a gloss dammar varnish. Those with design have had two coats of gloss dammar varnish and a final coat of semi-matte (matted with the addition of beeswax). This will provide a protective coating, and also prevent dirt from becoming ingrained in the paint layer. These varnishes have been chosen because they remain soluble indefinitely.

The small amount of consolidation required was achieved by applying the varnish warm.

Structural Repairs

Two of the panels were broken and required re-alignment. One had split and the other had separated into two pieces. The latter was set back together by inserting dowels and applying adhesive along the join, then clamping in place until set. The former was simply glued together then clamped until set (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: split panel glued and clamped to set

Woodworm Treatment

This will have been completed by the time the panels are returned. We will either be treating panels with a Thermo Lignum®¹ process or by applying Constrain®². The next stage will be to return them to Cromarty and establish a suitable means of display.

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¹ Thermo Lignum® is an effective yet natural and environmentally friendly alternative to chemical methods of insect pest eradication. It is suitable for use with painted wood and used widely in European museums and institutions.

² Constrain® is a water-based insecticide, developed by Historyonics, which is very effective against woodborers and other insect pests as it penetrates deeply into the wood. It is a colourless, odourless, safe material recommended for the control of all insect pests in museums, archives, historic houses etc.